

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ARA-06 ISO-00 EURE-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03

H-01 INR-07 L-02 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 RSC-01 PRS-01

SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 /063 W
----- 007500

P 031603Z FEB 75

FM AMEMBASSY PARIS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6345

INFO AMCONSUL BORDEAUX

AMCONSUL LYON

AMCONSUL STRASBOURG

AMCONSUL NICE

AMCONSUL MARSEILLE

AMCONSUL MARTINIQUE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PARIS 02847

E. O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, FR

SUBJECT: THE INDEPENDENT REPUBLICANS MOVE FRONT -- AND
CENTER

SUMMARY: AT THE FOURTH NATIONAL CONVENTION SINCE THEIR
FOUNDING BY VALERY GISCARD D'ESTAING IN 1966, THE
INDEPENDENT REPUBLICANS ELECTED MICHEL PONIATOWSKI
THEIR NEW PRESIDENT. THEY ALSO ELABORATED AN AMBITIOUS
PROGRAM DESIGNED TO MAKE THE IR THE MAJOR POLITICAL
FORCE IN A PRESIDENTIAL COALITION NOT LACKING IN
AMBITIOUS PARTY PROGRAMS. FACED WITH A REVITALIZED UDR
UNDER JACQUES CHIRAC' THE IR PARTY LEADERSHIP WANTS TO
UNITE THE FRENCH CENTER IN A WELL-FINANCED, BROAD-BASED
MOVEMENT CAPABLE OF BALANCING UDR STRENGTH IN THE
ASSEMBLY AND AMONG THE ELECTORATE. END SUMMARY.

1. MEETING IN A VAST AUDITORIUM DOMINATED BY A PHOTO
OF A SMILING GISCARD AND A LARGE SIGN READING "BECOME
SOMETHING MORE" (DEVENIR PLUS), OVER 2,000 INDEPENDENT
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REPUBLICAN OFFICIALS AND MILITANTS FROM METROPOLITAN

FRANCE AND THE OVERSEAS TERRITORIES GATHERED IN PARIS JANUARY 31-FEBRUARY 2 TO CONSECRATE MICHEL PONIATOWSKI AS THE PARTY'S NEW PRESIDENT (THE OFFICE HAS BEEN VACANT SINCE GISCARD'S ELECTION TO THE ELYSEE). THE IR LEADERSHIP HAS BEEN COMPLETELY OVERHAULED; JACQUES DOMINATI IS THE NEW SECRETARY GENERAL, AND THE TWO NEW VICE-PRESIDENTS ARE MINISTER FOR INDUSTRY MICHEL D'ORNANO AND SECRETARY OF STATE FOR UNIVERSITIES JEAN-PIERRE SOISSON. NOT SURPRISINGLY, ALL FOUR NEW OFFICIALS WERE ELECTED UNANIMOUSLY.

2. ROGER CHINAUD, WHOM GISCARD HAD CHOSEN AS IR SECRETARY GENERAL ONLY LAST JUNE, RECEIVED A RESPECTABLE CONSOLATION PRIZE BY REPLACING JEAN BROCARD AS PRESIDENT OF THE IR NATIONAL ASSEMBLY DELEGATION. UNDER CHINAUD, THE PARTY HAD MARKED TIME DURING A PERIOD OF GENERAL WEAKNESS ELSEWHERE IN THE FRENCH CENTER AND RIGHT. WITH A REVITALIZED UDR ASSERTING ITSELF UNDER PRIME MINISTER JACQUES CHIRAC'S DIRECTION, THE IR CLEARLY COULD NO LONGER AFFORD THE LUXURY OF A SECRETARY GENERAL OUT OF HIS DEPTH.

3. ANNOUNCING HIS "CANDIDACY" FRIDAY NIGHT, THEN AGAIN IN HIS "ACCEPTANCE" SPEECH SUNDAY MORNING PONIATOWSKI DELIGHTED THE DELEGATES BY LASHING OUT AT FRENCH MARXISTS ("PRISONERS OF 19TH-CENTURY DOGMA") AND CITED THE EXAMPLE OF PORTUGAL TO WARN FRENCH SOCIALISTS OF THE FATE AWAITING THOSE WHO BELIEVE IT POSSIBLE TO SURVIVE AN ALLIANCE WITH COMMUNISTS. "PCNIA" LAUDED CHIRAC FOR HIS EFFORTS AS PRIME MINISTER AND HEAD OF THE PRESIDENTIAL MAJORITY IN PARLIAMENT, BUT POINTEDLY FAILED TO PRAISE HIM AS UDR SECRETARY GENERAL. PONIATOWSKI'S SPEECH TOUCHED ON THE WHOLE RANGE OF FRENCH DOMESTIC AND FOREIGN CONCERNS AS A MEANS OF DEMONSTRATING HIS AUTHORITY AND IMPORTANCE IN THE GISCARD GOVERNMENT.

4. IN SPITE OF SOME FOOT-DRAGGING OVER THE WEEKEND BY THE MORE CONSERVATIVE ELEMENTS OF A HISTORICALLY CONSERVATIVE PARTY, THE INSTALLATION OF A YOUNG AND CONFIDENTIAL

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AMBITIOUS IR LEADERSHIP (ONLY PONIATOWSKI IS OVER 50) SUGGESTS THAT THE IR IS SERIOUS IN ITS NEWFOUND DETERMINATION TO BECOME A VIABLE COUNTERWEIGHT TO THE UDR WITHIN THE PRESIDENTIAL COALITION. THE SELF-CONSCIOUSLY "LIBERAL" RHETORIC AND FREQUENT REFERENCES TO GISCARD'S EFFORTS TO MODERNIZE FRENCH SOCIETY INDICATE THAT PONIATOWSKI, HAVING FAILED TO "RAID" THE UDR MEMBERSHIP, HAS NOW TURNED HIS SIGHTS TOWARD THE

FRAGMENTED FRENCH CENTER, WHICH SOMETIMES SEEMS TO HAVE
AS MANY PARTIES AS LEADERS..

5. THE NEW IR PRESIDENT, WITH GISCARD'S BLESSING, MAY
HAVE DECIDED THAT THE CONSERVATIVE SUPPORT OF "NOTABLES"
WHICH HELPED ELECT GISCARD HAS SERVED ITS PURPOSE.

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H-01 INR-07 L-02 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 RSC-01 PRS-01

SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 /063 W
----- 007514

P 031603Z FEB 75
FM AMEMBASSY PARIS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6346
INFO AMCONSUL BORDEAUX
AMCONSUL LYON
AMCONSUL STRASBOURG
AMCONSUL NICE
AMCONSUL MARSEILLE
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 02 OF 02 PARIS 02847

FREQUENT REFERENCES TO IR YOUTH (WHO WERE WELL IN
EVIDENCE) AND TO GISCARD'S "PERSPECTIVES AND REALITIES"
THINK-TANKS CONFIRM THAT THE IR, WHICH FINALLY HAS A
NATIONWIDE MACHINE AND A STRATEGY FOR LOCAL AND
LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS, IS TURNING ITS SIGHTS ON
CONFUSED AND DISGRUNTLED CENTRIST VOTERS.

6. AS NEARLY ALL SPEAKERS PIOUSLY NOTED, GISCARD COULD
NOT ATTEND THE CONVENTION BECAUSE HE HAS BECOME THE
PRESIDENT OF ALL FRENCHMEN. BUT HIS PRESENCE, LIKE

HIS SMILING PHOTOGRAPH, WAS UBIQUITOUS. THROUGHOUT THE CONVENTION, IN FACT, THE ACCENT WAS ON POWER. IN ADDITION TO PONIATOWSKI A HALF-DOZEN GOVERNMENT MINISTERS AND SECRETARIES OF STATE WERE ON STAGE, INCLUDING FINANCE MINISTER FOURCADE. GISCARD AND PONIATOWSKI HAVE DECIDED THAT THE TIME HAS COME TO PLAY THE CARD OF GOVERNMENTAL POWER IN ORDER TO HELP MAKE THE IR "BECOME SOMETHING MORE". IT REMAINS TO BE SEEN
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WHETHER THE IR CAN OVERCOME ITS IMAGE OF AN EXCLUSIVE CLUB AND BECOME A BROAD-BASED PARTY OF THE PEOPLE.

7. COMMENT: PONIATOWSKI'S ELECTION AS INDEPENDENT REPUBLICAN PRESIDENT ONLY SIX WEEKS AFTER CHIRAC'S TAKEOVER OF THE UDR CREATES CONDITIONS FOR BUILT-IN RIVALRY BETWEEN THE IR AND THE GAULLISTS WHICH IN TURN SOWS THE SEEDS FOR EVENTUAL DISCORD WITHIN THE PRESIDENTIAL MAJORITY. BARRING UNFORESEEN CIRCUMSTANCES, HOWEVER, WE BELIEVE THAT SUCH RIVALRY POSES NO REAL THREAT FOR THE PRESENT TO THE COHESIVENESS OF THE GOVERNMENT COALITION. A MORE AGGRESSIVE IR INEVITABLY FORESHADOWS AN INCREASED COMPETITION WITH THE UDR FOR NATIONAL ASSEMBLY SEATS PRIOR TO THE 1978 LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS. PONIATOWSKI AND CHIRAC, HOWEVER, CAN BE COUNTED UPON TO HOLD IR-UDR COMPETITION TO THE LEVEL OF A MANAGEABLE DISCORD WHICH WILL LAST BEYOND THE LEGISLATIVE ELECTIONS, PERHAPS COMING TO A HEAD AT THE TIME OF THE 1981 PRESIDENTIAL RACE. END COMMENT.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: PARTY LINE, POLITICAL PARTIES, PARTY MEETINGS, POPULAR SUPPORT
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 03 FEB 1975
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: GolinoFR
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1975PARIS02847
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D750039-0037
From: PARIS
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1975/newtext/t19750277/aaaacrwx.tel
Line Count: 203
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION EUR
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 4
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: GolinoFR
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 13 MAY 2003
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <13 MAY 2003 by ifshinsr>; APPROVED <14 MAY 2003 by GolinoFR>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
05 JUL 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: THE INDEPENDENT REPUBLICANS MOVE FRONT -- AND CENTER
TAGS: PINT, FR, INDEPENDENT REPUBLICANS, (PONIAOWSKI, MICHEL)
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 05 JUL 2006